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Egyptian-Israeli research is facing U.S. budget ax

By Bill Kritzberg
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A group of Egyptian and Israeli scientists meeting on Capitol Hill said yesterday joint research projects established in the Middle East after the Egyptian-Israeli peace accord are threatened by U.S. budget cuts and appealed for more funds to continue their work.

More than 1,000 Egyptian and Israeli scientists have participated in the U.S.-financed regional development program during the last six years. Its successes include the development of a new desert shrub, the eradication of an epidemic in Egypt and a new high-protein species of fish which the participants had for lunch yesterday.

The administrator of the Agency for International Development, M. Peter McPherson, said his agency "remains committed to the program" and insisted, "We will do our damndest" to ensure the administra-

tion's request is fully funded.

Mr. McPherson called the regional cooperative development project "an attractive program" which the administration believed should be funded for an extended period and not for just "one or two years."

He cited successes in agricultural, health and ocean sciences funded by the program which he said had demonstrated that "Arab and Israeli scientists have found much in common."

But Mr. McPherson warned that the Gramm-Rudman balanced budget law raised "real questions about what will happen this year."

"It would be prudent to be very imaginative in the next year" about seeking alternative sources of finance, he said.

Last year the administration asked Congress for \$5.78 million for the project and \$2.87 million was appropriated. The Agency for International Development, which ad-

ministers the program, has requested \$5.8 million for next year.

Suleiman Shenudah, an Egyptian-American said in order to "nourish this (Israeli-Egyptian) relationship we have to increase contacts" fostered by the program.

Rep. Henry Waxman, Democrat of California, a principal sponsor of the program, said he would push to expand it. Rep. Benjamin Gilman, Republican of New York, another advocate, called the program "critical for peace." he said regional scientific cooperation "is one of the best kept secrets in the Middle East."

Yair Kagan of Israel's Hebrew University said the program was at a crossroads. He called the Washington meeting "a landmark" in Egyptian-Israeli cooperation which was crucial "in the process of (scientific) cross-fertilization and the exchange of ideas. It will enhance the slow process of normalization."

Joseph Califano, former secretary of health, education and welfare in the Carter administration and currently head of the board which oversees the program, said "It is extraordinary to have Egyptians and Israelis fighting together on Capitol Hill for more money."